

*A Critique Gutenberg to Arab Spring: A Journey of Media Evolution***N. Usha rani**

Abstract *Mass communication transformed the experience of human communication from simple linear mode to complex nonlinear process. The era of mass communication produced mass media like newspapers and magazines to serve the humanity that not only spread literacy and expanded knowledge but also influenced politics and business structures thus wielding enormous power in the society. There is enough evidence in the history to believe the extensive use of mass media like radio and cinema as tools of political propaganda by governments across the world. The migration of news from traditional bastion to non linear social media territory influenced civil society movements in both democracies and totalitarian regimes. Of course, social media did not cause Arab Spring but it changed the social order and broke the media stereotype and gave an impetus to journalism. Journalism across the globe was able to capture its lost sheen due to social media's entry into news. Journalism is not going to die but media are crucial in distribution and consumption of news. It is a matter of grave concern that if business interests marginalize journalism in the digital era it will be a sad day in the history of journey from Guttenberg to Arab Spring.*

Key Words: *Arab Spring, Guttenberg, Media Control, New Media, Propaganda, Mass Communication*

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INTRODUCTION: THE ERA OF MASS COMMUNICATION

The birth of mass communication is a milestone in the history of human civilization that left indelible mark in the society changing the lives of people for ever. Mass communication transformed the experience of human communication from simple linear mode to complex nonlinear process. The era of mass communication began with the invention of printing press that widened the horizon of knowledge through modernized means of distribution of information.

Johann Gutenberg, a German goldsmith invented the movable types and printed the first ever book in 1440 that shaped the future of publishing industry in the world. Knowledge which was the prerogative of the selected few in the pre printing era suddenly came within the reach of common

people owing to mass production of books. News books and pamphlets, the forerunners of modern newspaper got an impetus with the invention of printing press. The urge to express one's opinion on public issues in public interest prompted publishers to promote newspapers as early as 17th century. Newspaper gained immediate public acceptance in the society as it tried to establish affinity with institutions like society, government, religion and business. The early newspapers integrated business with public service establishing the crucial role of advertising in newspaper economy by 19th century. Two vital factors attributed to the emergence of newspaper as a powerful mass media are the invention of telegraph (1844) and telephone (1876). Technological intervention gradually changed the social order influencing behavior and attitude of the people thus prompting sociologists to revisit the human communication process.

The society of pre industrial era was feudalistic and traditional with low levels of literacy and limited choice of livelihood suffered from stringent social norms and high rate of poverty and low growth rate. With the rise of industrialization, the social, economic and cultural factors changed leading to social mobility and formation of urban societies. The presence of newspapers during greater social transformation shaped the lives of the people in new urban communities. The era of mass communication produced mass media like newspapers and magazines to serve the humanity that not only spread literacy and expanded knowledge but also influenced politics and business structures thus wielding enormous power in the society.

Twentieth century saw the arrival of radio immediately after World War I and the political circumstances obviously expanded its agenda. Radio was the culmination of innovations with wireless telegraph and radio telephone that propelled Guglielmo Marconi from Italy to establish telecommunications empire, the American Marconi Company. The larger utility of radio and telegraph in military and business establishments saw the expansion of broadcast media by leaps and bounds. Radio was shaped as medium of mass communication by business companies who invested huge funds for commercial interests in the early part of 20th century. Public embraced the only aural medium, the radio, the medium of sound with curiosity and joy owing to its novelty and simplicity. Radio was modeled on the lines of newspaper to disseminate news as politicians and government saw a powerful tool in radio to propagate their ideas and reach public. Within a short span of its existence, radio was also taken over by powerful totalitarian regimes headed by the likes of Adolf Hitler. Radio gained immense popularity in Europe and

USA as a means of propaganda with political movements of different hues and shades using it to gain public acceptance of their political ideologies. During World War I even democracies like USA controlled radio

and banned radio operations by the public and were unsuccessfully challenged by radio companies against the censorship illustrating the supremacy of radio as a powerful means of mass communication. Both Americans and Germans used radio to garner public support to the global battle. Germans led by Hitler propounded Nazi propaganda to the people through programs and speeches broadcast over radio. A true mass media like radio had a reach of 9 million households in Germany and 28 million households in USA during 1938-39. There was forceful marketing of radio sets by Germans for propagating Nazi's ideologies to the masses and they succeeded in reaching the people right in the comfort of their homes. Americans used nationalist programs and social messages over radio to win public support to the war. Most nations in the world took part in World War II and intriguingly both democracies and totalitarian regimes firmly believed in using radio as a means of war propaganda.

The mass medium like radio provided an opportunity for the nations to gain public control and influence social change. Radio developed as a medium of political and sports news generating huge advertising revenue threatening newspapers by cutting into their circulation and advertising revenue. A military coup anywhere in the world also meant taking over the national radio stations to establish complete control over the nation speaks volumes of the perception of the power of radio in the good part of pre and post modernization period.

Radio undisputably became a medium of news of the common man but was controlled by the elites in politics and business. Radio competed with newspaper to earn a berth in the realm of news media as conservatives in newspapers were skeptical about the radio defending virtues of press freedom against the business and entertainment interests. Ironically, newspapers were initiated into journalism by the innovations of telegraph and telephone. Radio had excelled as a business enterprise rather than as a medium with a missionary zeal to protect and serve public interest unlike newspaper. The golden era of radio began in 1930 posing threat to music and newspaper industries. News broadcast posed a serious peril to the existence of newspapers with radio news being heard and distributed fast round

the clock earning more advertising revenue threatened the closure of newspapers. Overcoming the barriers of illiteracy and geographical boundaries radio could reach more people than newspapers and therefore gained an upper hand and established closer affinity with government and business establishments. Radio swiftly captured the masses and influenced the media listening habits with innovative program formats earning huge advertising support. Interestingly, newspapers recovered from the onslaught of radio by 1950s as the visual media like Cinema and Television made inroads into mass audience held by radio.

Nevertheless, the power to reach illiterates and mass audience consisting of haves and have nots on equal footing with news, information, education and entertainment in the simplest cost effective medium prompted the nations to control radio. Even today, most of the nations including largest democracy like India continues to control radio by banning private radio from broadcasting news.

The era of visual media that began in 1948 influenced social, economic and political changes in most of the nations in Europe, USA and Asia in the greater part of 20th century. Television, a technological marvel is the culmination of many inventions of mechanical and electronic scanning and picture tubes. The growth and impact of television, as a major source of news and entertainment, surpassed the reach of newspaper and radio and earned enormous advertising support never seen in the history of mass media. Post World War II saw the rise of television as the most powerful mass media making inroads into every aspect of content dabbled by print media and radio posing huge challenge to the conventional media. Newspapers felt threatened and radio listenership declined due to the onslaught of television. Unable to bear the competition, news media forged hands together and the era of cross media ownership among newspapers, radio and television began as early as 1960s. Cross media ownership was criticized for encouraging greater media control by few media monarchs and working against the citadels of free press.

The swift expansion of television since 1960s caused social change posing challenges to sociologists and psychologists. The technological advancement of television to show news and sports live coupled with high quotient of entertainment placed the medium several notches above all the mass media transforming it as a single dominant force generating theories, models and research on mass

communication. Television news basking in the glory of golden age assumed significance in reporting public affairs influencing politics, governance and civil rights movements for over four decades (1950-90s) in nations like USA and Europe. Of course the rise of television led to the decline of radio but newspaper asserted its supremacy as a primary source of credible news. Nonetheless its circulation gradually declined in USA and Europe by the end of 20th century. It is interesting to record that both newspapers and television emerged as dominant but distinct and independent mass media disseminating news unlike radio complimenting each other in their news coverage. Despite the unprecedented popularity of TV, newspapers scored over visual media with their historic investigative story on 'Watergate scandal' causing the President of USA Richard Nixon in 1974 to quit in ignominy. Both media pursued investigative journalism with commitment and perseverance upholding journalistic responsibilities during the latter part of 20th century causing political upheavals in many nations.

The media content of 80s underwent a sea change focusing more on objectification of women in ads and tv programs. Heavy dosage of sex, drugs, violence and obscenity in films raised debate on media effects on women, youth and children. The government, public, civil society and academic researchers blamed television especially MTV, Hollywood films, soap operas and gambling shows for eroding tradition, culture and value system in the society. Television was branded as an evil medium causing negative influence on the mass audience. The unbridled power and freedom enjoyed by television came under government scanner and one section of society wanted media control to check the so called malicious influence of television. There were two schools of thought, one advocated media control and the other believed in liberal media supported by empirical studies that proved 'media have minimal effects because these effects are mitigated by variety of intervening variables' (Lazarsfeld, 1944 & 1955). Unfortunately, governments across the world believed in either direct or indirect media control and used them to further their political agenda and they continue to do so.

BIRTH OF NEW MEDIA ERA

The traditional mass media were caught off the guard with the sudden challenges of technology by the fag end of 20th century and beginning of 21st century marking the rise of 'Digital Era'. Bill Gates

said in 2004, ‘Convergence doesn’t happen until you have everything in a digital form that the consumer can easily use on all the different devices’ (Cited in Baran & Davis, 2007). Gates prediction made in 2007 that all forms of news media, newspapers, TV and radio will ultimately converge onto one medium, the Internet (Boriss, 2007) has come true in 2013. Industry and academia have realized its implications, ‘Internet is the present and future and therefore the convergence is the present and future. I do not want to invest money on old ways of distribution of media products’ (Kenney, 2007).

Technically print, broadcast/ radio and television no longer exists as independent entities as technology has changed their identity. Interactive technologies have paved the way for multiple-platform publishing and integrated journalism. Media convergence has integrated media delivery platforms where the resources of a newspaper are used to bolster the content of other media and vice versa. Convergence is all about change in mindset than about technology. ‘An understanding of convergence is an understanding that the way people consume news has changed profoundly....news organizations have to realize that their audiences have changed and media consumption pattern have changed.....stories are told differently in different media’ (Covington,2007). Convergence has changed the way journalism is practiced and delivered. Technically, ‘convergence is what takes place in the newsroom as the editorial staff works together to produce multiple products for multiple platforms to reach a mass audience with interactive content on a 24x7 basis. Anything less is not journalism convergence’ (Quinn, 2005). Branded as multi-platform reporting, convergence takes all new kinds of new media ranging from websites to cell phones to blogs and to ipods. It is the marriage of traditional conventional media and the new media. Technically, it is the convergence of video, sound, printed text, music, graphics, animation and still photo in digital form with interactivity features.

The convergence got visibility with the US media company, the Media General, establishing a model of media convergence, the mother of all convergence by bringing together WFLA- TV at Tampa enjoying large TV market, Tampa Tribune- the newspaper and the Tampa Bay Online (TBO) - the online site, under one common roof in March 2000 (Tompkins and Colon 2000). WFLA News Director Dan Bradley’s statement that all the three media would ‘share their journalism minute-to-minute, 24hrs a day, every day’ (Ibid) heralded the arrival of new brand of journalism but posed new challenges to media management. TV, print and online media were brought under one roof in

Tampa-Tribune model of convergence with a first of its kind converged news facility set up at a cost of \$ 40 million in 121,000 square-foot space to facilitate the new kind of media bonding (Ibid).

To support establishment of convergence media, a state of art convergence news centre- Newsplex came up in November 2002 at a cost of \$ 2.5 million by World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WANIFRA), renowned as the world's first convergence newsroom facility at the University of South Carolina, Columbia in USA showing how media landscape was changing with multiple delivery platforms. Newsplex is a convergence training facility with opulent state of art 12-seat newsroom imparting training to journalists and academicians in convergence. Journalists from different parts of the world visit and receive training in convergence at Newsplex. Randy Covington, the Director of Newsplex says 'it is a training facility...It is not the physical facility. We are talking about Newsplex in terms of philosophy of convergence. What really important is that the philosophy, the concept behind it. We are not putting out the newspaper, we are not trying to put TV newscast but rather we are trying to figure out how to cover the story for different media in a way that is most effective for each media' (Covington 2007). Establishment of Tampa, the convergent newsroom and Newsplex,

the convergent training facility in the early part of 21st century led to much greater recognition of convergence.

The media saw the emergence of a new brand of news consumer, who consumed news from converged media by choice and who could not be described as a listener, reader, viewer or browser because he converged different consumption patterns. The recent trends show most of the conventional newspapers including New York Times are using the opportunity to launch new social media feed like Twitter to provide access to breaking news with editors to live tweet stories establishing the migration of news to social media. In 2012, The New York Times and The Washington Post newspapers compiled their list of Twitter users and provided them a link to NASA, Google and MIT media labs armed with easy clickable links to access latest information on Hurricane Sandy news making digital and mobile editions available to news consumers. Today Twitter and Facebook have been recognized as tools of news and major sources of news. Twitter is a valuable 24x7 source for news breaks, tool to follow newsworthy people and organization and is a gold mine for getting story ideas and to have continuous dialogue with users. The analysis of Tweets will establish the mood of the public, pulse of the community and the degree of public opinion on issues of public concern. Barack Obama's famous 3 worded Tweet, 'Four more years', announcing

his re-election as 44th President of the United States of America was retweeted by 8 million users and was the major source of news to the world media on November 6, 2012. Obama’s tweet and a photo of Obama and his wife Michelle were run and flashed across the globe by the international media establishing the arrival of social media in hard news. Perhaps, New York Times now has over twice as many readers on the microblogging service than its most popular print edition, the Sunday paper and its followers on Twitter have crossed 4 million. Therefore, circulation of a newspaper has become complex with the facility of print and digital editions accessed by wide range of devices by news consumers. The global trend indicates ‘like the sun newspaper circulation rises in the east and falls in the west’ (economist.com, 2013) illustrating decline in circulation and advertising in Europe and America where as it has increased by 10% in Asia with China leading the world as the biggest newspaper market. Despite decline in circulation, newspapers reach a large number of readers- print, online and mobile giving an impetus to the performance of advertising (WAN-IFRA, 2013)

Table-1

India			USA		
Newspaper	Television	New Media	Newspaper	Television	New Media
5 to 8 % annual growth Increase in digital edition readership	231 million households 563 million audience	137 million Internet users	Print edition is declining but e-edition, mobile edition increasing	289.3 million show signs of decline	245 million 78% Internet shows signs of increase
Primary source of News					Primary source of News

Comparative Media Reach Trends in USA and India

According to the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) in a world with a population of approximately 7 billion, global newspaper in print readership remains high. In 2012 more than 2.5 billion people read their daily newspapers in print, 500 million read daily newspapers in both print and online, and 100 million accessed online daily newspapers only (January 1, 2013). But there is significant decline in the print newspaper advertising revenue and this loss is not made up by its digital editions.

Table-2

Social Media vs Access	World		USA		China		India	
	Total users in World	Penetration in World population	Social media	Penetration in population	Social media	Penetration in population	Social media	Penetration in population
Internet	2.4 b	34.3%	245 m	78.1%	538 m	40.1%	137 m	11.4%
Twitter	500 m		22.9 m		36.5 m		33 m	
Facebook	1 b	12.1%	166 m	52.9%	6.3 m	0.0%	62 m	5.2%

New Media Consumption pattern in USA, China and India

ARAB SPRING

The migration of news from traditional bastion to non linear social media territory influenced civil society movements in both democracies and totalitarian regimes. Arab Spring is a milestone in the history of media as it shows how democratization of media emboldens ordinary people to express their mind against state causing political change. Arab Spring is a symbol of pro-democracy revolutionary movements that made its foot prints in Middle East and North Africa and played a key role in political upheavals in the countries where media control ruled for ages. Arab Spring can be construed as an event that propelled social media to the centre of news industry compelling the political regimes to mull on regulating the new media.

New media considered as alternative media is basically a democratized channel of communication that is free from government, editorial and management control with public access to infinite space and time coupled with opportunities to own a blog or a website or linked to social media to express oneself. The experience of getting heard/ read/noticed gave visibility to the voice of the voiceless in societies where dictatorial regimes had oppressed the freedom of speech and expression for ages. In democracies too, the perception of news and views changed adding different shades of perspectives. Common people could enjoy freedom of speech and expression in both democracies and totalitarian governments. According to some of the Arab Spring activists, ‘protests consisting of millions of people could be organized through social media like Facebook and Twitter’ demonstrated the power of social media in shaping public support to political causes. These new media could connect with the masses breaking all psychological barriers. Arab Spring activists have said, ‘we use Facebook to

schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate and You Tube to tell the world' speaks volumes of the potential of the media that connects with masses. Interestingly, there has been total disconnect between conventional mass media and the masses where public opinion does not reflect the public mind. Arab Spring model was feasible that could be replicated in any society, democratic or totalitarian, and change social order reducing the psychological barriers between government and the public.

Of course, social media did not cause Arab Spring but it changed the social order and broke the media stereotype and gave an impetus to journalism. Journalism across the globe was able to capture its lost sheen due to social media's entry into news. Journalism is not going to die but media are crucial in distribution and consumption of news. Many have predicted the end of newspapers but print continues to be a major source of information for all media. It is speculated that print may have to compete with its own digital edition of the paper in the years to come. People are going to read news either in print or digital edition but they are going to call the shots by choosing the device as well as the content. The news consumers are already using interactive technologies to have global conversation on local issues. New media has led to the birth of new breed of journalists known as data scientists advocating data journalism.

Journalism in social media is not only about facts, facts and facts but about point of view or opinion underlining news stories that are analytical and interpretative. Newspaper culture is the stumbling block in the transformation of print in the battle against digital media. There is a conflict between editorial policy of newspaper and social media policy. All media are going to survive if they converge. Convergence hold key to journalism. The presence of news in social media has made even powerful governments insecure. For instance Wiki leaks have threatened high and mighty in the world. Governments in democracies flaunting liberal media policy too want to control social media in the guise of ethics and privacy. Facebook has been banned in China since 2009. It is a matter of concern when journalists in social media toe the line of news organizations that they represent that might reinforce stereotype raising the crucial issue of safeguarding freedom of speech and expression. But there is no looking back as blogging, branding and brain storming is the new sutra of journalists who have to improve and learn new skills- *popcorn, Twittercycle,*

Talkwheel, Berryappleor or whatever.

“Mark Zuckerberg wants to connect the world – that is his vision-if Facebook hasn’t got China, he hasn’t connected the world’, says Beijing basased Bill Bishop of DigiCha.(Singh, 2012). The business interest of Facebook losing heavily in not reaching China market has raised fundamental issues. Are we going to use Facebook to have a change of political leadership to fight political battles in China or to promote business interests to earn huge revenue from the world’s largest Internet market? Can social media like Facebook break Great Wall of China and cause political upheavals?

The big question however is how journalism is going to survive in the news industry driven by market forces. Is media convergence market driven or journalism driven? Is this media convergence going to promote technology business interests or journalism interests? If business interests marginalize journalism in the digital era it will be a sad day in the history of press in its journey from Guttenberg to Arab Spring.

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